



## **Ideology and Partiality in David Hume's *History of England***

Laird Okie

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IDEOLOGY AND PARTIALITY IN DAVID HUME'S  
HISTORY OF ENGLAND

Since its publication in 1754-62, critical assessments of David Hume's History of England can be broadly divided into three phases. During Hume's lifetime the history was, on the whole, favorably received. It is true the first volume, treating the early Stuarts, met initially with a cold reception. The London booksellers, resentful of the History's Scottish publishers, waged a successful campaign to stifle its commercial success. And the sympathetic portrait which Hume drew of the Stuarts, especially Charles I, precipitated a round of rebuttals against this "Tory" historian. Nevertheless, Hume's succeeding volumes met with a far kinder fate, and the complete history, ten years after the Stuart volume appeared, had already established itself as by far the most popular history of England ever written. Even from Hume's detractors there was widespread praise for his literary grace and narrative clarity. And the response from the Continent was enthusiastic. Voltaire's rapturous assessment echoed the views of many:

Nothing can be added to the fame of this history, perhaps the best ever written in any language.... Mr. Hume, in his History, is neither Parliamentary nor Royalist, nor Anglican nor Presbyterian -- he is simply judicial.<sup>1</sup>

The learned Whig histories of Henry Hallam and George Brodie slightly dimmed the splendor of Hume's reputation in the early nineteenth century until Macaulay finally eclipsed it in popularity. Macaulay accused Hume of being more an advocate than an historian, and in the nineteenth century Whig epoch of Macaulay, Froude, Green and Gardiner, Hume's History of England was generally denigrated as an old fashioned

Tory history, based upon a superficial and tendentious reading of the sources.

As the Whig interpretation of history came under fire in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century, Hume's reputation was gradually and partially rehabilitated. Thomas Preston Peardon, in his 1933 historiographical study of the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century, criticized Hume for his narrowly political focus and Tory slant. But he concluded that "fundamentally his position rested upon a philosophical reading of a given historical situation, not upon a selection of facts to serve the ends of a party."<sup>2</sup> As early as 1941 Ernest Mossner argued that Hume was not, in fact, a Tory historian; and in his 1954 biography he praised the History for its "broad sweeping narrative of the national developments, philosophically coherent, artistically ordered, and preeminently readable."<sup>3</sup>

But the big reevaluation of Hume has only taken place in the 1960s and '70s.<sup>4</sup> In 1965 the intellectual historian Richard Popkin classified Hume as a philosophical historian par excellence, a skeptical mind who stood above the clerical and partisan passions of the age. Constant Nobel Stockton in the 1970s praised Hume for exploding Whig myths of the ancient constitution and for integrating a science of man into the traditional political chronicle; among other things the History of England was a pioneering work of economic history. Victor Wexler published an article in 1976 with the revelatory title of "David Hume's Discovery of a New Science of Historical Thought." Wexler pictured Hume as an embattled philosophe, brandishing his pen against the accumulated falsehood of party historiography, particularly Whig historiography. Hume, he submitted, had utilized his sources in a critical fashion which modern scholarship would

find acceptable. Similarly, John J. Burke, Jr. interpreted Hume's History as a brilliant refutation of "dogmatic" Whiggery.

The most thoroughgoing and influential rehabilitation of Hume's historical writing has come from Duncan Forbes, first in a long introduction to the Penguin edition of Hume's early Stuart volume (1970), then in a book on Hume's political philosophy (1975).<sup>5</sup> Forbes rates the History of England nothing short of "a masterpiece; it is essential and vintage Hume."<sup>6</sup> He sees Hume's historical writing, especially his narrative English history, as the key to Hume's "philosophical politics." According to Forbes, Hume wanted not simply to discredit the conventional party histories but to provide a historical work of political moderation that would help harmonize the pointless political and ideological divisions that continue to bedevil the state. Above all, this meant weaning the Whigs away from their archaic and potentially subversive adherence to the shibboleths of social contract and resistance. Hume's notorious first volume, encompassing the English Civil War, was the centerpiece of the work:

From the practical point of view the first volume was the vital sector on the historiographical front in Hume's campaign to educate the Whigs in political realities, to provide "moderation" in politics, and provide the Establishment (that is the Revolution Settlement, the Union of 1707, the Hanoverian Succession) with a respectable, modern, post-revolutionary intellectual basis -- all government, as Hume pointed out in a well-known saying, being founded on opinion.<sup>7</sup>

Forbes labels Hume's political philosophy as "skeptical" or "scientific" Whiggism, as opposed to the prevailing "vulgar" Whiggism -- the Whiggism of ancient constitutionalism, contract and resistance pieties,

crude and superannuated Tory baiting. Forbes also uses "vulgar Whiggism" to denote the rancorous partisanship and stale dogmas that afflicted the Tories as well as the Whigs.<sup>8</sup>

In his endeavor to fashion a unifying, philosophical history, Hume centered his discussion on two interrelated themes: liberty and civilization:

For Hume, civilization is essentially a political concept, meaning law and order or liberty; and the history of civilization is the history of "liberty" and the conditions which make "liberty" possible, especially economic progress and the rise of the "middling rank of men."<sup>9</sup>

The new plan of liberty involved a change in the climate of opinion due to the progress of society and civilization and the emergence of the "middling rank," which refused any longer, because it was no longer in their interest, to tolerate anomalies and irregularities and evasions of law in favour of liberty and parliamentary privilege.<sup>10</sup>

It was the parliamentary opponents of James I and Charles I who were the innovators, not the Stuart kings. When the House of Commons went on the offensive, it represented the forces of modernization -- all those who wanted a more uniform, regular and rational government, one which would better uphold liberty.

But according to Forbes, Hume was no apologist for the Stuarts. One did not have to be an ancient constitutionalist to recognize, as Hume did, that England possessed a limited, mixed monarchy in the Tudor-Stuart era and that James and Charles occasionally encroached upon the privileges of parliament. The irregularities, however, were not of a character to justify the violent and visionary schemes of John Pym and the hardliners in the Commons. These

men were champions of liberty, but, as Forbes relates Hume's position, "the new plan of liberty was wholly new and untried, even now unique, and therefore an exceedingly hazardous venture when it first emerged."<sup>11</sup> An exponent of moderation, Hume believed it was "the wise and moderate" men who best served the constitution, though Forbes does not make it clear who these were exactly. But the central point about Hume's interpretation of the English Revolution was that it was the growth of civilization that, fundamentally, made the Commons go on the offensive; and it was parliament's aggression in turn, not the personalities of Charles and James, that provoked the sometimes heavyhanded actions of the crown. Hume's moderate, philosophical narrative "provides a built-in impartiality which the critics, hunting for 'Tory' hares, are liable to overlook altogether."<sup>12</sup> For the most part Hume steered clear of the now-famous pitfalls of the Whig interpretation -- the patriotic and Protestant affirmation of England's special destiny as the birthplace of freedom, the crude "heroes and villains" conception of historical development.

Hume explicitly rejected all providential and preternatural explanations of historical events. As for his famous strictures against Puritanism, "Hume has been accused so often of failing to understand manifestations of 'religious' feeling and experience that it is perhaps time to say, in a sense that we ought to be able to appreciate, he understood these things only too well...."<sup>13</sup>

The revisionists, especially Forbes, must be credited with illuminating the "philosophical" themes of Hume's History that set it apart from traditional British historiography. Hume did in fact write a history of civilization, describing the transition from feudalism and "barbarism" to modernity, occasionally

linking political change to alterations in the "manners of the age," cultural and artistic, as well as economic. The tone of the work is refreshingly cosmopolitan and free of chauvinism, which is probably one reason why it was so popular in France.

What remains open to question, however, is the assertion that Hume overcame party distortions to produce a scholarly and impartial meditation on English history. Did Hume in his History of Great Britain in the Reigns of James I and Charles I (1754) transcend the "vulgar" partisan prejudices, Whig and Tory, that pervaded Augustan historical writing? In order to answer this question we must first define the salient features of Whig and Tory historiography. The most popular early eighteenth century history of England was the distinctly Whiggish history of the Huguenot exile Paul de Rapin-Thoyras. It was this work above all others that Hume set out to replace. Rapin echoed the traditional Whig view that English freedom could be traced back to the Saxon constitution and that England had possessed a "mixed government" ever since the Anglo-Saxon conquest.<sup>14</sup> Power was shared between king and parliament. This system reached its apogee in the reign of Queen Elizabeth before being challenged by James I, who tried to roll back the power of parliament. The early Stuarts threatened the constitution by asserting that royal power was absolute and the hereditary succession inviolable. Determined to dispense with parliament, Charles resorted to noxious financial expedients like Ship Money. Rapin described the Puritans as all those opposed to the crown's innovations.

Both sides, according to Rapin, were to be blamed for the nation's slide into civil war after the Long Parliament convened in 1640, though the Royalists were most at fault. Rapin wrote favorably of the

legislation passed by parliament in 1640-41 to check the excesses of Stuart rule, but he criticized the aggressive strategies of Pym and his adherents. They strove to mobilize the London populace against the king. Rapin's sympathies rested unmistakably with the "political Presbyterians," the Puritan moderates who wanted constitutional safeguards against arbitrary government, but rejected such hardline measures as the destruction of episcopacy and the installation of a Presbyterian theocracy.

No Tory history of the early eighteenth century approached Rapin's work in prestige and influence. Lord Clarendon's History of the Rebellion was still by far the preeminent pro-Tory history of the English Civil War. Published posthumously in the Tory stronghold of Oxford during the reign of Queen Anne, its release was designed to provide historical and ideological ammunition for a Tory political offensive. Clarendon's History set forth the essentials of the Royalist-Tory creed in magisterial fashion. It extolled the sacred character of church and king; it painted a rosy picture of peace and prosperity under Charles I; it depicted religious dissidents as regicides and revolutionaries. The History of the Rebellion constituted the definitive apologia for what the Tory Earl of Rochester, in his preface to the first edition, called the "old Royalist party."<sup>15</sup>

Clarendon's Royalist interpretation reverberated in the Augustan Tory histories of Laurence Echard, Thomas Salmon, and Thomas Carte.<sup>16</sup> Politically, these three works cover the Tory spectrum from left to right. Echard was a moderate Hanoverian Tory who is sometimes mistakenly labeled a Whig.<sup>17</sup> The leading authority on Echard, William Aiken, identified Echard definitively as a Tory historian, aided and encouraged by Tory politicians. He was attacked as such by Whig critics



and defended by Tories.<sup>18</sup> There can be no question about Thomas Salmon's allegiances. The extremity of his views can be gauged by his denunciations of Clarendon for daring to find fault with Charles I. Salmon's paean to the early Stuarts narrowly steered clear of Jacobitism. Thomas Carte had no such inhibitions. An avowed Jacobite, Carte's History of England propagated a Filmerite, High Tory conception of monarchy, implicitly supporting the King over the Water.

Whatever their differences, Echard, Salmon, and Carte (and Clarendon before them) shared a common Royalist-Tory interpretation of the English Revolution. They all defended the theory and practice of Stuart kingship and attacked the Puritan-led opposition as hypocritical, power-hungry malcontents. They pictured the early seventeenth century as a time of peace and plenty. And they also perceived the same social basis to the Civil War -- rabble and commonalty, Parliamentary; aristocracy and gentry, Royalist.

Scornful of previous historians, especially Rapin Thoyras, Hume vowed to supersede the partisan chroniclers with a truly objective history of England. Forbes and Wexler, with qualifications and reservations, accept Hume's protestations of impartiality. To illustrate Hume's evenhandedness, Forbes cites instances of Hume describing the opposition to James and Charles as bearers of liberty and criticizing the Stuarts for their unconstitutional transgressions.<sup>19</sup> However, Hume did not mete out praise and blame consistently during his narrative of early Stuart England. There is a striking contrast between Hume's remarks about the crown during the period from 1603 to 1629 and his treatment of Charles I's personal rule in the 1630s. The great bulk of Hume's obiter dicta against the Stuart regime is to be

found in the first period, not in his narrative of the 1630s or '40s.

Almost from the start of his history Hume paints a fairly negative portrait of James I. Richard Ollard has pointed out how Hume's image of James I and the succeeding Stuarts paralleled that of his immediate historical predecessor: there are

strange congruities in the perspective offered by Thomas Carte the Jacobite archivist and David Hume the philosopher of the Enlightenment. Both have a low opinion of James I, both insist (against plenty of evidence to the contrary) that Charles I was incapable of bad faith, and both, either largely or wholly, abandon any systematic defense of Charles II's kingship.<sup>20</sup>

Profligate and tactless, James I, according to Hume, was a man of absolutist principles who lacked the personality and revenues to rule with an iron fist.<sup>21</sup> James inherited a monarchy that had grown increasingly authoritarian under the Tudors; he was no more arbitrary than his immediate predecessor. Hume describes the Puritans as the cutting edge of a political movement designed to establish liberty and limited government. He criticizes James for the forced loans and other financial expedients.

Hume's objections to royal policies extend into the first four years of Charles I's reign. The forced loans of 1626, for example, were "a violation of liberty and must, by necessary consequence, render all parliaments superfluous...." (HE 5:21) He criticizes those Caroline bishops who advocated passive obedience to forced loans. (HE 5:22) He attacks the insidious influence of the Duke of Buckingham in the counsels of the King, and referring to the late 1620s, he noted Charles' "open encouragement and avowal of such principles as were altogether incompatible with a

limited government." (HE 5:43) By contrast, Hume writes that "the views of the common people were much more judicious and profound." (HE 5:33)

But by 1634 Hume avers that Charles I's administration "seems to have been more gentle and equitable than that of most of his predecessors." (HE 5:81) Hume views the personal government of Charles from 1629 to 1640 as moderate and just. Gone are his strictures against a servile church. "Peace too, industry, commerce, opulence; nay, even justice and lenity of administration, notwithstanding some very few exceptions; all these were enjoyed by the people." (HE 5:93)

Hume supports the political reforms in the first year of the Long Parliament, such as the destruction of prerogative courts and the Triennial Act. But reform was undermined by the unjustifiable prosecution of Strafford and other crown servants and by parliament's ecclesiastical innovations. (HE 5:126-40) Hume's narrative from 1640 onward is pro-Royalist and anti-Parliamentarian. The House of Commons in 1640 was made up of "jealous innovators" who deliberately set out to abolish bishops. (HE 5:127) Even before Strafford's execution in May 1641 a revolution had occurred:

The whole sovereign power being in a manner transferred to the commons, and the government without violence or disorder, being changed in a moment from a monarchy almost absolute to a pure democracy, the popular leaders seemed willing for some time to spend their active vigor, and to consolidate their authority, ere they proceeded to any violent exercise of it. (HE 5:135-36)

Parliament's claim that it guarded the ancient constitution was a hypocritical "artifice." (HE 5:139) It was Charles who stood by the ancient constitution;

the Puritans were the "greatest innovators." Confronted with an intractable Commons, Charles promptly abandoned his domineering prerogative. His subsequent pliability and docility were "no less dangerous to the constitution and to the public peace" than his earlier rigidity had been. (HE 5:148)

Vivid testimony of Hume's Royalist bias is to be found in his character sketches of various Royalist and Parliamentary leaders. Hume's heroes are all Royalists. The able but autocratic Strafford is transfigured into "one of the most eminent personages that has appeared in England...." (HE 5:168) Lord Falkland "displayed that masculine eloquence and undaunted love of liberty which, from his intimate acquaintance with the sublime spirits of antiquity, he had greedily imbibed." (HE 5:256) While conceding Archbishop Laud's tactlessness, Hume expresses admiration for Laudian ceremonialism insofar as it worked to temper religious fanaticism through the contemplation of ornaments and ritual. (HE 5:298)

Hume's characterizations of Parliamentary leaders are decidedly negative. John Hampden "sought the abolition of monarchy and the subversion of the constitution; an end, which had it been attainable by peaceful measures, ought carefully to have been avoided by every lover of his country." (HE 5:247) Thomas Fairfax was tainted by religious "prejudices." (HE 5:289) Hume calls Henry Ireton a "tyrant" and while granting Cromwell's genius -- even greatness -- deprecates the Roundhead general as a self-seeking opportunist and "fanatical hypocrite." (HE 5:58,299)

Hume's generalizations about the kind of people who supported the two sides in the Civil War are also revealing. The "prime nobility and gentry" flocked to Charles I's standard at Yorke in 1642. (HE 5:219) Parliament held every advantage in the Civil War save

the quality of their adherents: "More bravery and action were hoped for from the generous spirit of the nobles and gentry than from the base disposition of the multitude. (HE 5:229) The Royalists clung to that "moderate freedom" inherited from their ancestors and secured by the initial reforms of the Long Parliament. (HE 5:219)

Probably the most famous instance of Hume staking out a "Tory" position is in his panegyric of Charles I after the king's execution. Like Clarendon before him, Hume submitted that Charles lacked the vigor and dexterity needed to overcome "the encroachments of a popular assembly." But Hume's overall verdict was clear:

His virtues predominated extremely above his vices, or, more properly speaking, his imperfections; for scarce any of his faults rose to that pitch as to merit the appellation vices. To consider him in the most favorable light, it may be affirmed that his dignity was free from pride, his humanity from weakness, his bravery from rashness, his temperance from austerity, his frugality from avarice. (HE 5:379)

Charles' strong prerogative government stemmed from constitutional tradition -- at least since the Tudors -- and from the onslaughts of the Puritans. At one point Hume asserts that Charles was less arbitrary than all kings since the Conquest except perhaps James I. (HE 5:553) Hume's Charles I is free of duplicity. All his concessions to the opposition sprang from a genuine willingness to limit his prerogatives and curtail the powers of the Church.

Hume's blinkered perception of Charles is nicely illustrated by his account of the King's notorious negotiations with the Earl of Glamorgan in 1646. (HE 5:319) Against all the evidence to the

contrary, Hume accepts Thomas Carte's spurious claim that Charles I never promised to repeal the penal laws in Ireland; nor did he negotiate with Glamorgan behind the back of Ormonde, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

Hume's denunciations of Puritanism are well known. The one favorable judgment he makes about them is that, emboldened by religious passion, they carried a spark of liberty. But Hume's view of Puritanism was neither subtle nor balanced. The clear message, broadcast over and over, is that the Puritans were raving fanatics, inherently seditious. They indulged in "rapturous flights, ecstasies, visions, superstitions." Although Hume does not hesitate to censure the Puritans in his narrative of James I's reign, most of his scorn is reserved for after 1630, as groundswell of opposition grew against the Laudian Church. For all his "philosophical" perceptions about the rise of civilization and liberty, when it comes to explaining why men were willing to take up arms against their sovereign, it is Puritan irrationalism that Hume points to:

The grievances which tended chiefly to inflame the parliament and nation, especially the latter, were the surplice, the rails placed about the altar, the bows exacted on approaching it, the liturgy, the breach of the Sabbath.... On account of these were the popular leaders content to throw the government into such violent convulsions; and to the disgrace of that age and of this island, it must be acknowledged that the disorders in Scotland entirely, and those in England mostly, proceed from so mean and contemptible an origin. (HE 5:145)

Here is how Hume describes the typical Puritan Roundhead:

The saint, resigned over to superior guidance, was at full liberty to gratify all his appetites, disguised under the appearance of pious zeal.

And besides the strange corruptions, engendered by this spirit, it eluded all the ties of morality and gave entire scope, and even sanction, to the selfishness and ambition which naturally adhere to the human mind. (HE 5:331)

The Roundhead army, Hume writes, represented "a base populace exalted above their superiors, hypocrites exercising iniquity under the vision of religion." (HE 5:358) He erroneously lumps the Independents together with the Levellers as fanatical egalitarians, bent on the abolition of monarchy and the aristocracy. (HE 5:231,282)

No doubt Hume's railings against the Puritans were in part the scorn felt by the anti-clerical skeptic toward the religious zealot. No doubt too this was one reason why the History was admired by the philosophes. But taken together with his other strictures against the Parliamentarians, it is hard to resist the argument that Hume's anti-Puritanism was the reverse side of his pro-Royalism.

Given Hume's shift toward a distinctly anti-Parliamentarian, and thus anti-Whig, perspective in his narrative of the 1630s and '40s, the question becomes, why did this change in emphasis occur. The answer is to be found by considering the remarkable political developments of 1628-29, including the assassination of Buckingham, the truculence of the Commons, and, above all, the Petition of Right. Hume viewed Charles I's acquiescence to the Petition as a momentous political concession:

It may be affirmed, without exaggeration, that the king's assent to the Petition of Right produced such a change in the government as was almost equivalent to a revolution; and by circumscribing, in so many articles, the royal prerogative, gave additional

security to the liberties of the  
subject. (HE 5:44)

And how did parliament respond to these "sacrifices of the prerogative -- the greatest by far ever made by an English sovereign"? (HE 5:46) The Commons threatened Buckingham with impeachment and challenged the King's constitutional right to levy tunnage and poundage. Without any "public necessity and without any fault of his own," Charles was being asked to countenance the complete subversion of monarchy. (HE 5:54) Charles addressed parliament in January 1629 in a "moderate temper, now freed from the influence of Buckingham's violent counsels." (HE 5:53) Confronted, however, with the venomous contumacy of Sir John Eliot and his allies in the House of Commons, Charles reverted to the only sensible alternative, personal rule.

Charles now pursued a statesmanlike course. In the conciliar government of the 1630s, Hume argues, Charles anticipated the modern policy whereby the encroachments of "popular leaders" were neutralized by giving them office. This policy demonstrated that a "secret revolution had occurred in the constitution, and had necessitated the prince to adapt new maxims of government." (HE 5:65) Whatever blemishes Charles displayed were overshadowed by the fanaticism and extremism of his opponents, an extremism that drove some members of the opposition like Thomas Wentworth and William Noys to side with the court. These recruits practiced the politics of moderation advocated by Hume. In light of the ungovernable posture assumed by the House of Commons in 1628-29, Charles had every right to pursue the authoritarian but moderate personal government of the 1630s. By approving the Petition of Right and rallying the political moderates, Charles had shown himself to be a compromising, constitutional monarch. As the balance of Hume's narrative makes



clear, it was the fanatical, incendiary opposition to Charles, both in England and Scotland, that must bear chief responsibility for the breakdown in government and plunge into civil war.

Hume preached the virtues of political moderation, but in the History of Great Britain in the Reigns of James I and Charles I, it was moderation with an anti-Whig, pro-Royalist coloring. Hume wrote with imagination and insight, but his narrative does not reflect a philosophical raison d'être to explode partisan falsehoods. On the contrary, Hume rehearsed at least some of the misconceptions and distortions of his Tory forbears. If Charles I was not the stupid tyrant of Whig legend, his "bottomless duplicity" and "perverse ineptitude" are well known to modern historians, as they were to many commentators in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>22</sup> Hume simply ignored the mountain of evidence against him. Similarly, there is no hint in Hume's account of that "brutal authoritarianism" that made the Earl of Strafford a byword for tyranny.<sup>23</sup> Caroline and Laudian repression pale next to Hume's grotesque caricature of Puritan bigotry and fanaticism. His Puritan fanatics were self-conscious revolutionists, hypocritically paying lip service to the ancient constitution; Hume ignored the fidelity, however mistaken, which the common lawyers and the parliamentary allies felt toward medieval precedents.<sup>24</sup>

Hume's Royalist/Tory bias can be further documented by examining his use of sources. Although he relied heavily on the documentary collections of Bulstrode Whitelocke and John Rushworth, two pro-Parliamentarian historians, his account of the Revolution and Civil War owed more to pro-Royalist writers, especially Clarendon. At several important points in his narrative Hume parroted Clarendon's

commentary in an unscholarly manner that does not measure up to the critical, skeptical method attributed to him by his recent champions.

Consider, for example, Hume's account of the impeachment proceedings against the Earl of Strafford. Nearly two pages of Hume's description paraphrase Clarendon's account in The History of the Rebellion.<sup>25</sup> Hume began by describing the opening speech in parliament against Strafford:

Pym, in a long studied discourse, divided into many heads, after his manner, enumerated all the grievances under which the nation labored.... (HE 5:130)

Clarendon started this way:

Mr. Pimm, in a long, formed discourse, lamented the miserable state and condition of the kingdom, aggravated all the particulars which had been done amiss in the government as done and contrived maliciously....<sup>26</sup>

After summarizing the speeches against Strafford, Hume described the move to impeach:

After several hours spent in bitter invective, when the doors were locked, in order to prevent all discovery of their purpose, it was moved, in consequence of the resolution secretly taken, that Strafford should be immediately impeached of high treason. This motion was received with universal approbation; nor was there, in all the debate, one person who offered to stop the torrent by any testimony in favor of the earl's conduct. Lord Falkland alone, though known to be his enemy, modestly desired the house to consider whether it would not better suit the gravity of their proceedings, first to digest by a committee many of those particulars which had been mentioned, before they sent up an accusation against him. It was ingeniously answered by Pym, that such a delay might probably blast all their hopes, and put it out of their power to

proceed any further in the prosecution.  
(HE 5:131)

This was all Clarendon:

In conclusion, after many hours of bitter inveighing and ripping up the course of his life before his coming to Court and his actions after, it was moved, according to the secret revolution taken before, "that he might be forthwith impeached of high treason," which was no sooner mentioned than it found a universal approbation and consent from the whole; nor was there in the whole debate, one person who offered to stop the torrent by any favourable testimony concerning the earl's carriage, save only that the lord Falkland, who was very well known to be far from having any kindness for him, when the proposition was made for the present accusing him of high treason, modestly desired the House to consider "whether it would not suit better with the gravity of their proceedings first to digest many of those particulars which had been mentioned by the committee?" declaring himself to be abundantly satisfied that there was enough to charge him before they sent up to accuse him; which was very ingenuously and frankly answered by Mr. Pymm, "That such a delay might probably blast all their hopes, and put it out of their power to proceed further than they had done already."<sup>27</sup>

Although Hume consistently cited Clarendon as a source, his notations do not indicate the extent to which he adhered to Clarendon's text.

Hume also repeated Clarendon's erroneous view that Oliver Cromwell engineered the Agitator movement in the army during the winter and spring of 1647. "Cromwell," wrote Clarendon,

hitherto carried himself with that rare dissimulation (in which sure he was a very great master,) that he seemed exceedingly incensed against this insolence of the soldiers.... But as many of the wiser sort had long discovered his wicked intentions, so

his hypocrisy could no longer be concealed. The most active officers and agitators were known to be his creatures, and such who petition did nor would do anything but by his direction. So that it was resolved by the principal persons of the House of Commons, that when he came the next day into the House, which he seldom omitted to do, they would send him to the tower; presuming that if they had once severed his person from the army they should easily reduce it to its former temper and obedience.<sup>28</sup>

Cromwell, of course, ended this trap. Hume followed Clarendon closely:

This artful and audacious conspirator had conducted himself in the parliament with such profound dissimulation, with such refined hypocrisy, that he had long deceived those who, being themselves very dexterous practitioners in the same arts, should naturally have entertained the more suspicion against others. At every intelligence of disorders in the army, he was moved to the highest pitch of grief and anger.... But information being brought that the most active officers and agitators were entirely his creatures, the parliamentary leaders secretly resolved that, next day, when he should come to the house, an accusation should be entered against him, and he should be sent to the tower. (HE 5:335)

The dubiousness of Hume's uncritical adherence to Clarendon is compounded by the fact that Clarendon's record of Cromwell's speeches in the Commons during the row between the army and parliament is highly unreliable.<sup>29</sup> Hume also repeated Clarendon's contention that Cromwell used the Agitators' threats against Charles I as a pretext for browbeating the King at Hampton Court -- increasing the guard around him and isolating him from other Royalists.<sup>30</sup>

Another instance of Hume's reliance on Clarendon is to be found in Hume's discussion of the Self-Denying Ordinance. Starting with Cromwell's attack on the Earl of Manchester, Hume's six-page account is drawn entirely from The History of the Rebellion, with much of Clarendon's phraseology repeated almost verbatim.<sup>31</sup> And echoes of Clarendon can be found in Hume's character of Lord Falkland. Hume praised Falkland lavishly, as had Clarendon. Among other things, Hume noted that "from the commencement of the war, his natural cheerfulness and vivacity became clouded, and even his usual attention to dress, required by his birth and station, gave way to a negligence which was easily observable." (HE 5:257) In Clarendon's famous portrait of Falkland he commented that

....from the entrance into this unnatural war, his natural cheerfulness and vivacity grew clouded, and a kind of sadness and dejection of spirit stole upon him which he had never been used to.... In his clothes and habit, which he had intended before always with more neatness and industry and expense than is usual to so great a mind, he was not now only incurious but too negligent.<sup>32</sup>

Clement Walker's History of Independency was another important source for the History of England. Walker had sided with parliament during the Civil War, but the History of Independency, written in the late 1640s, was a bitter inditement of both the Independents and the Presbyterians. Hume's highly critical assessment of parliament's excise tax during the Civil War was drawn from Walker. Walker had written that

....the Exchequer way of accounts is the exactest, antientest, and best known way of account in England, and most free from deceit, which is almost confessed de facto, when, to make the king's Revenue more obnoxious to their

desires, they took it out of the Exchequer way, (contrary to the fundamental Laws of the Land; for both the Higher and Lower-Exchequer are as antient and fundamental as any Court in England) and put it under a Committee, which as all other Committees do, will render an account of their Stewardship at the latter day.<sup>33</sup>

Hume abridged this description:

The method of keeping accounts practised in the exchequer, was confessedly the exactest, the most ancient, the best known, and the least liable to fraud. The exchequer way was for that reason abolished, and revenue put under the management of a committee, who were subject to no control. (HE 5:338)

Hume's account of Harry Ireton's 1648 speech in support of the Vote of No Addresses, barring further negotiations with the King, comes from Walker. First Walker, followed by Hume:

Then commissary Ireton (seeming to speak the sense of the army, under the notion of many thousand Godly men who had ventured their lives to subdue their enemies) said after this manner, that the King had denied safety and protection to his people by denying the four Bills; that subjection to him was but in lieu of his protection to his people; this being denied, they might well deny any more subjection to him, and settle the Kingdom without him.<sup>34</sup>

Ireton, seeming to speak the sense of the army, under the appellation of many thousand godly men, who had ventured their lives in defence of the parliament, said, that the king, by denying the four bills, had refused safety and protection to his people; that their obedience to him was but a reciprocal duty for his protection of them; and that, as he had failed on his part, they were freed from all obligations to allegiance, and must settle the nation, without consulting

any longer so misguided a prince. (HE 5:353)

In the cases enumerated above, Hume at least cited Clarendon and Walker in his footnotes, though the extent of his debt to them is not made clear. But Hume did not always disclose his source. Sometimes he cited Richard Perrinchief's apologia, The Royal Martyr, or the Life and Death of King Charles I; other times he did not. Here is Hume's account of how Cromwell, to the very end, tried to persuade Lord Fairfax that the King's execution was necessary:

The generous Fairfax, not content with being absent from the trial, had used all the interest which he yet retained to prevent the execution of the fatal sentence; and had even employed persuasion with his own regiment, though none else should follow him, to rescue the king from his disloyal murderers. Cromwell and Ireton, informed of this intention, endeavored to convince him that the Lord had rejected the king; and they exhorted him to seek by prayer some direction from heaven on this important occasion; but they concealed from him that they had already signed the warrant for the execution. (HE 5:378)

Although Hume did not cite him, Perrinchief was, in all likelihood, the source for this passage:

While these things were acting, the Lord Fairfax, who had always forbore any public appearances in the practices of this murder, had taken up (as credibly reported) some resolutions (either in abhorrency of the crime, or by the solicitations of others) with his own regiment, though none else should follow him, to hinder the execution. This being suspected or known, Cromwell, Ireton, and Harrison coming to him, after their usual way of deceiving, endeavored to persuade him that the Lord had rejected the King, and with such like language as they knew had formerly prevailed upon him, concealing that they had that very

morning signed the warrant for the assassination; they also desired him with them to seek the Lord by Prayer, that they might know his mind in the thing.<sup>35</sup>

There is a more striking instance of Hume paraphrasing Perrinchief. The execution of Charles I, Hume argued, had a cataclysmic impact:

Never monarch, in the full triumph of success and victory, was more dear to his people, than his misfortunes and magnanimity, his patience and piety, had rendered this unhappy prince. In proportion to their former delusions, which had animated them against him, was the violence of their return to duty and affection; while each reproached himself, either with active disloyalty towards him, or with too indolent defense of his oppressed cause. On weaker minds, the effect of those complicated passions was prodigious. Women are said to have cast forth the untimely fruit of their womb; others fell into convulsions, or sank into such a melancholy as attended them to their grave; nay, some undmindful of themselves, as though they could not or would not survive their beloved prince, it is reported, suddenly fell down dead. The very pulpits were bedewed with unsuborned tears; those pulpits which had formerly thundered out the most violent imprecations and anathemas against him. (HE 5:378)

The image of women miscarrying and men falling down dead all over England because of a king's death is not what we expect to see evoked by a skeptical philosophe. If we turn to page 228 of Perrinchief, we find the following passage:

Never any king, not only of the English, but of whatsoever throne, had his death lamented with greater sorrows, nor left the world with a higher regret of the people. When the news of his death was divulged, women with child for grief cast forth the untimely fruit of their womb, like her



that fell on travail when the glory was departed from Israel. Others, both men and women, fell into convulsions and swoounding fits, and contracted so deep a melancholy, as attended them to the grave. Some, undmindful of themselves, -- as though they could not or would not live when their own beloved prince was slaughtered (it is reported) -- suddenly fell down dead. The pulpits were likewise bedewed with unsuborned tears; and some of those for whom the living king was for episcopacies' sake less acceptable, yet now bewailed the loss of him when dead.<sup>36</sup>

Perrinchief was an arch-Royalist of the most extreme sort. Hume did not cite Perrinchief or anyone else for this passage.

The foregoing has demonstrated that Hume wrote with a strong Royalist bias and that he drew uncritically upon the work of Royalist and Tory historians. This is not to say, however, that Hume was a Royalist/Tory historian in the classical mold of Clarendon, Echard, Salmon, and Carte. Hume was never a party man and not a Tory. He strove in his political writings to replace the anachronistic Whig/Tory dichotomy with an up-to-date "establishment" political ideology. Hume rejected what he identified (mistakenly) as the distinguishing feature of eighteenth century Toryism: political allegiance to the Stuarts.<sup>37</sup> Similarly he assailed the Whig canons of social contract and ancient constitutionalism.

When Hume began work on his History, however, he had other concerns in mind besides political philosophy. Hume, as Wexler points out, had an axe to grind: The History was, in part, a "vehicle" for attacking the Whigs because Hume resented the Whig monopoly of place, position, and literary taste. He wrote with an intense desire to discredit the Whig interpretation of history as popularized by Paul de

Rapin-Thoyras. The Whig hegemony, Hume commented, "has proved destructive to the truth of history and has established many gross falsehoods." (HE 5:364) He judged Rapin to be too critical of the Stuarts and "totally despicable."<sup>38</sup>

Intent on repudiating Whig historiography, Hume restated classic Tory positions. As David Miller observes in his recent study of Hume's political thought, the History "on most key points ... leans toward traditional Tory rather than traditional Whig interpretations."<sup>39</sup> Hume said as much in an oft-quoted passage from My Own Life. Responding to Whig denunciations of his first volume, covering the early Stuarts, Hume resolved to make subsequent revisions "invariably on the Tory side." (HE 1:x)

The History of Great Britain in the Reigns of James I and Charles I offered historical justification of some conventional Tory views. Hume did not nominate Charles I as a candidate for martyrdom, but the victimization of this supposedly virtuous prince formed the dramatic core of his narrative. As Linda Colley points out, "Tory monarchical piety drew its emotional sustenance more from Charles the Martyr than from the substantial persons of George I and his successor."<sup>40</sup> The spectre of the Civil War continued to haunt the Tories and sustain their obeisance to Church and throne. Hume concluded that the history of the Civil War showed "the madness of the people, the furies of fanaticism, and the danger of mercenary armies," sentiments which echoed the traditional Tory hostility to religious Dissent and opposition to standing armies. (HE 5:382) Hume shared the Tory rejection of ancient constitutionalism and the Tory belief that the Stuarts were no more high-handed than their Tudor predecessors.

Nevertheless Hume's secularism, his occasional praise for the parliamentary opposition to James I and

Charles I, and his unfavorable portraits of the later Stuarts in the succeeding volumes of his History, distinguish him from traditional Tory historians. But as Hume's uncritical use of Royalist arguments and sources indicates, the History of England contains a strong dose of what might be called vulgar Toryism intermixed with Hume's philosophical politics. Hume's interpretation of English history was closer to Clarendon and Carte than to Rapin and the Whigs.

C.H. Firth was one who believed that Hume possessed a Tory view of history. By Tory, however, Firth meant no more than a "belief in monarchy and a distrust of fanatics and reformers."<sup>41</sup> There was more to Augustan Toryism than this, but "Toryism" did become identified with "conservative reaction" in the 1770s, if not before.<sup>42</sup> George III reconciled most Tories to the court. The American Revolution fanned Tory authoritarianism. Toryism came increasingly to mean a generalized opposition to political and religious reform and belief in "the divine right of a properly constituted authority."<sup>43</sup> The attempts in the 1780s to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts and, above all, the French Revolution, fueled this conservative, quasi-Tory ideological revival. The central ideological division now became radicalism versus conservatism.<sup>44</sup> Political debate spread beyond the confines of the ruling class to the middling classes, spilling outside the halls of Westminster to the public meeting and the street.

Hume reacted angrily to the popular reform movements that emerged in the 1760s and 1770s. Miller argues convincingly that Hume's hostility to the Wilkite extraparliamentary agitation anticipated the conservative condemnation of radicalism during the French Revolution. The History, Miller submits, can be seen as part of Hume's effort to make a conservative,

non-Jacobite appeal to the Tories.<sup>45</sup> If Hume's History did not become the bible of conservatism in the manner of Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, it did nonetheless, in conjunction with his political writings, contribute to the formation of a conservative ideology in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. Hume's pro-Stuart sympathies no longer offended the ruling elite in the age of revolution. In his own rather cool and colorless way, after all, Hume's lamentations for Charles I paralleled Burke's tears for Louis XVI. David Bongie has revealed that in France the History became a "weapon of the Counter Revolution" even more than Burke's Reflections, at least before the turn of the century.<sup>46</sup> It was actually more praised and cited by the "traditionalists" than by the philosophes and helped shape the conservative ideology of Joseph de Maistre. Conversely, the radical historian Catherine Macaulay, who wrote her History of England as an attack on Hume, was the darling of French reformers and republicans.

Even though Hume wrote with an anti-Whig animus, it is, paradoxically, correct to regard the History as an establishment work, one which implicitly endorsed the ruling oligarchy. Hume's resentments were directed narrowly at the Old Corps Whigs, not at the propertied elite as a whole. What cannot be accepted is the current image of Hume as impartial scholar or skeptical philosophe, determined to seek the truth about the past amidst a mire of partisan commentaries. Hume's anti-Whig preconceptions distorted his analysis and skewed his interpretation.

Laird Okie  
Ottawa University  
Ottawa, Kansas

1. Quoted in Ernest Campbell Mossner, The Life of David Hume, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), p. 318.
2. Thomas Preston Peardon, The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1933), p. 72.
3. Mossner, Life of David Hume, p. 316.
4. For this reevaluation see Richard H. Popkin and David Fate Norton, eds., David Hume: Philosophical Historian (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965); Constant Noble Stockton, "David Hume: Historian of the English Revolution," Eighteenth Century Studies, vol. 4, no. 3 (Spring 1971): 274-94; Stockton, "Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's History," in Hume: a Reevaluation, ed. Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York, 1976), p. 298; Victor G. Wexler, "David Hume's Discovery of a New Science of Historical Thought," Eighteenth Century Studies, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1976-77): 185-203; Wexler, David Hume and the History of England (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 8, 22-3; John J. Burke, Jr., "Hume's History of England: Waking the English from a Dogmatic Slumber," in Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, ed. Roseann Runte (Madison, Wis.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 235-51.
5. Duncan Forbes, "Introduction" to David Hume, History of Great Britain: The Reigns of James I and Charles I (London, 1970); Forbes, Hume's Philosophical Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975). Forbes' interpretation is ensconced in J.W. Burrow's A Liberal Dissent: Victorian Historians and the English Past (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 26-27; John Kenyon's The History Men: The Historical Profession in England Since the Renaissance (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), pp. 41-57; H.T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), pp. 132-39.
6. Forbes, "Introduction," p. 8.
7. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
8. See Forbes, Hume's Philosophical Politics, pp. 125-92.

9. Forbes, "Introduction," p. 15.
10. Forbes, Hume's Philosophical Politics, p. 276.
11. Ibid, p. 283.
12. Ibid., pp. 285-86.
13. Forbes, "Introduction," p. 47.
14. For Rapin's interpretation see Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, The History of England, as well Ecclesiastical as Civil, done into the English from the French, with large and useful notes (and a summary of the whole)..., by N. Tindal, 2d ed., 2 vols. (London, 1733), 2:212-13, 65, 141, 159-236, 371-455.
15. Lawrence Hyde, "Preface" to the Earl of Clarendon, The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England, 6 vols., orig. publ. 1702-4 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1888), 1:li.
16. Laurence Echard, The History of England from the first entrance of Julius Caesar and the Romans to the conclusion of the reign of King James II and the establishment of King William and Queen Mary upon the throne in the year 1688, 3d ed., 3 vols. (London, 1720); Thomas Salmon, The History of England, 11 vols. (London, 1732-34); Thomas Carte, A General History of England, 4 vols. (London, 1747-54).
17. See, for example, D.C. Douglas, English Scholars, 1660-1730, 2d ed. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951), p. 134; and Victor Wexler, "David Hume's Discovery of a New Science of Historical Thought," Eighteenth Century Studies, vol. 10, no. 2 (1976/77): 195.
18. William A. Aiken, The Conduct of the Earl of Nottingham (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 1-38. For contemporary commentaries see Edmund Calamy, "A Letter to Mr. Archdeacon Echard Upon Occasion of his History of England (London, 1718); John Oldmixon, The Critical History of England (London, 1724); Zachary Grey, A Defense of our ancient and modern historians against the frivolous cavils of a late pretender to critical history (London, 1724).
19. See Forbes, Hume's Philosophical Politics, pp. 272-75.

20. Richard Ollard, The Image of the King (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 186.
21. See David Hume, The History of England, 6 vols., orig. pub. 1754-62 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1871), 4:378-527, for Hume's discussion of James I. The 1871 version of Hume's History employed here is one of many later editions incorporating his original volume on the early Stuarts. Although Hume revised this first volume for subsequent editions, the changes do not extend to the particular passages cited in this paper nor to his overall interpretation. All remaining citations will be incorporated in the text as HE with volume and page number/s following.
22. See Lawrence Stone, The causes of the English Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 138; and J.P. Kenyon, Stuart England (London: A. Lane, 1978), p. 42.
23. See Kenyon, p. 121.
24. John Kenyon points out that "the opponents of the monarch were for the most part sturdy reactionaries who wanted nothing more than to restore our 'ancient liberties' of a century, perhaps even two centuries before." Lawrence Stone comments: "The use made by the opposition of medieval precedents ... was not merely a matter of the cynical manipulation of inapposite precedents for current political purposes. The pedantic legal antiquaries like Hakewill and Coke and Prynne believed deeply in the principles they dredged out of the past, however self-serving they may seem to historians of a later age." See J.P. Kenyon, The Stuart Constitution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 7, and Lawrence Stone, The Causes of the English Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 105.
25. See Clarendon, 1:222-25; Hume, 5:130-31.
26. Clarendon, 1:222.
27. Clarendon, 1:225.
28. Ibid., 4:223.
29. See C.H. Firth, "Clarendon's History of the Rebellion, Part III," English Historical Review, 75 (July 1904): 478.

30. See Hume, History of England, 5:347-49; Clarendon, 4:261-62.
31. See Hume, History of England, 5:282-88; Clarendon, 3:451-60.
32. Clarendon, 3:187-88.
33. Clement Walker, The Compleat History of Independency (London, 1661), pp. 8-9.
34. Walker, Compleat History, p. 70.
35. Richard Perrinchief, The Royal Martyr, or the Life and Death of King Charles I, 3d ed. (London, 1684), p. 57.
36. Perrinchief, Royal Martyr, pp. 228-29. This passage is among several instances of plagiarism disclosed in George Brodie, A History of the British Empire, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1822), 2:54; 3:183-84; 4:206-7, 212-15, 226-27.
37. The latest historian of Toryism faults Hume for maintaining "that the Tories owed their distinct quality to their attachment to the House of Stuart. Hume was wrong." Linda Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1740-60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 115.
38. Quoted in Wexler, David Hume and the "History of England", p. 14.
39. David Miller, Philosophy and Ideology in David Hume's Political Thought (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 173.
40. Colley, p. 115.
41. C.H. Firth, "The Development of the Study of Seventeenth-Century History" in Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (London, 1913), 7:38-9.
42. See Frank O'Gorman, The Emergence of the British Two-Party System 1760-1832 (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 45.
43. Paul Langford, "Old Whigs, Old Tories and the American Revolution," in The British Atlantic Empire before the American Revolution, eds. P. Marshall and G. Williams (London: Cass, 1980), p. 124.



44. See Henry T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), pp. 195-231.
45. Miller, 173-184, 194-205. On Hume's conservatism see also Sheldon Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism," in Hume: a Reevaluation, ed. Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), pp. 239-256.
46. Laurence L. Bongie, David Hume: Prophet of the Counter-revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 68-79.